



Executive Proposed Phase 1 Plan Interim Use and Resource Protection

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Prepared for:

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**EXECUTIVE PROPOSED
EAST LAKE SAMMAMISH TRAIL
PHASE 1 PLAN-INTERIM USE AND RESOURCE PROTECTION**

In September 1998, King County realized a long term goal with the purchase of the railbanked East Lake Sammamish rail corridor for a recreational trail and alternative transportation link. The 10.8 mile trail will parallel the eastern shoreline of Lake Sammamish, and connect the cities of Redmond, Sammamish, and Issaquah, as well as Lake Sammamish State Park and King County Marymoor Park. King County Departments of Parks and Recreation and Construction and Facility Management have prepared an Interim Use and Resource Protection Plan for the trail corridor, implemented an expansive and inclusive public involvement process, and administered a thorough environmental review including an Environmental Impact Statement.

King County is now ready to begin development of the first phase of the East Lake Sammamish Trail, Interim Use and Resource Protection. These proposed interim use and resource protection measures respond to the public call for recreational trails and alternative transportation opportunities; our responsibility to protect natural resources and to minimize impacts to neighboring property owners; the body of work encompassed in the draft Interim Use and Resource Protection Plan and the Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statements; and hundreds of public comments and responses.

I. RECOMMENDATION SUMMARY STATEMENT

I am recommending that the *East Lake Sammamish Trail Interim Use and Resource Protection Plan* be implemented as described by the Proposed Action in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and Section III of this document. This gravel trail will extend from the off ramp of SR 520 in Redmond, south to Gilman Boulevard in Issaquah. Finding no significant unmitigatable impacts from the Proposed Action in the FEIS, the Interim Use Trail will be developed completely on the railbed.

II. BACKGROUND

Project Need and Objectives

The East Lake Sammamish trail has been identified as an important link in King County's regional trail system, because it will not only provide recreational opportunities and open space, but has the potential for use as a transportation corridor as well. Trail users will be able to access the Burke Gilman Trail in Seattle, continue on the Sammamish River Trail to Marymoor Regional Park in Redmond, travel south along the eastern shores of Lake Sammamish within the City of Sammamish, pass by Lake Sammamish State Park, and ultimately connect to the Mountains-to-Sound Greenway in the City of Issaquah.

The Interim Use Trail will be located along the eastern shore of Lake Sammamish, extending from north of Marymoor Park in the City of Redmond to the City of Issaquah, just south of Interstate 90 at Gilman Boulevard. The Interim Use Trail is 10.8 miles in length and passes through the Cities of Redmond, Sammamish and Issaquah, as well as unincorporated portions of King County.

Project History

The East Lake Sammamish Trail has been included in numerous planning documents adopted by King County over the years. The following is a list of adopted documents that identified the East Lake Sammamish Trail:

- 1971 King County Urban Trails Plan
- 1975 General Bicycle Plan
- 1982 East Sammamish Community Plan and Area Zoning
- 1988 King County Open Space Plan
- 1992 King County Regional Trails Plan
- 1993 East Sammamish Community Plan and Area Zoning Update
- 1993 King County Non-motorized Plan
- 1996 King County Park, Recreation and Open Space Plan

In addition to the Trail's inclusion in various planning and policy documents, the King County Council supported the East Lake Sammamish Trail through its adoption of the 1997, 1998, 1999, and 2000 King County Annual Budgets. Each budget contained acquisition, operations, and/or Capital Improvement Program money for the East Lake Sammamish Trail project (Ordinance 12538, adopting 1997 budget; Ordinance 12926, adopting 1998 budget; Ordinance 13340, adopting 1999 budget; Ordinance 13678, adopting 2000 budget).

In 1996, the Burlington-Northern/Santa Fe Railroad (BNSF) ceased operations along the proposed East Lake Sammamish Trail corridor. The Land Conservancy purchased the active railroad corridor from BNSF in April 1997, and owned the corridor continuously until September 1998. In 1997, King County and the Land Conservancy requested that the Surface Transportation Board impose interim trail use/railbanking on this corridor under 16 U.S.C. 1247(d). The application to railbank this corridor was approved by the Surface Transportation

Board in August 1998 and a Notice of Interim Trail Use (NITU) was approved for issue. Railbanking is a viable and constitutional alternative to outright abandonment of a railroad right-of-way, allowing rail carriers to both preserve their future interest in operation of a rail line and provide public trails until such time as the corridor is returned to rail use. Through railbanking, the rights of the railroad to operate and manage the right-of-way are transferred to an agency or trail sponsor. King County purchased the railbanked corridor from the Land Conservancy on September 18, 1998.

The Interim Plan

In November 1998, the King County Council directed the Executive branch to prepare an Interim Use Trail Plan for the East Lake Sammamish Corridor (Ordinance 13340) for Council review and adoption. The plan was to include public input and necessary environmental review. In keeping with this direction, the *East Lake Sammamish Trail Interim Use and Resource Protection Plan* (Draft, King County, 1999) was developed. The *East Lake Sammamish Trail Interim Use and Resource Protection Plan (Interim Plan)* project objectives were:

1. Open the railbed to the public during trail master planning and construction phases.
2. Protect the environment.
3. Create an interim trail that is safe for trail users and adjacent property owners.
4. Build a positive, long-term relationship with local residents, trail users, and other constituents.
5. Establish and maintain a trail that is a good neighbor to adjacent property owners and local communities.

During the development of the *Interim Plan*, comments were solicited through public workshops and meetings, individual meetings with property owners, meetings with potential user groups, an email response link on a project Internet web site and voice-mail via a project telephone hotline. A Citizens Advisory Group (CAG) was also convened to provide recommendations on the proposed trail. The CAG held five public meetings during the development of the *Interim Plan*. Input was sought from potential trail users and property owners adjacent to the trail. Two workshops and one open house were held to gather public input on trail planning issues and draft mitigation concepts. Over 600 people attended the various meetings and public workshops with approximately 575 public comments received.

Environmental Review

In the summer of 1999, a public review process was initiated to identify the major issues associated with implementing the *Interim Plan* along the corridor, providing an interim use trail and resource protection measures. Due to the level of public concern, the complex nature of natural resource protection associated with the East Lake Sammamish Trail corridor, and the

potential for significant environmental impacts, a Determination of Significance was issued. The Phase I Interim Use and Resource Protection Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was initiated in October 1999. As part of the EIS process, a scoping process including a public meeting was held to identify issues for review in the Draft EIS. The scoping period resulted in several hundred written and verbal comments being submitted.

The Draft EIS was released May 19, 2000, evaluating three alternatives: the Proposed Action, Alternative 1 Bypass, and the No Action Alternative. **The Proposed Action**, would route the Interim Use Trail along the existing railbed, **Alternative 1 Bypass**, proposed using an alternative corridor that bypassed a portion of the existing railbed, and **Alternative 2 No Action**, proposed only some of the resource protection measures.

The Final EIS was issued August 25, 2000. The FEIS responds to public comment through text revisions and direct responses to comment letters received.

Summary of Major EIS Conclusions

The EIS identified no significant impacts from the development of the Proposed Action that cannot be mitigated.

The Proposed Action and the Bypass Alternative differ slightly in their impacts to the natural environment. Alternative 1 impacts slightly more wetlands than the Proposed Action, and includes construction of a ramp on a steep slope.

The Bypass Alternative re-routing of the Interim Use Trail off the railbed and onto East Lake Sammamish Place SE and East Lake Sammamish Parkway SE is less safe for trail users than the Proposed Action. Under the Bypass Alternative, there is an increased potential for pedestrian and bicycle conflicts with existing vehicular traffic on the 1.6 miles of bypass roadways and the additional 26 driveways or roads that intersect with the bypass route.

The Bypass Alternative would have reduced impacts to approximately 47 property owners whose properties or land uses are bisected by the Interim Use Trail. The Bypass Alternative re-routed an approximately 1.6 mile section of the Interim Use Trail away from these properties onto East Lake Sammamish Place SE and East Lake Sammamish Parkway SE. However, this alternative transferred some of these impacts to approximately 19 properties that front on East Lake Sammamish Place SE but not on the railbed.

Alternative 2, the No Action Alternative, has minimal impacts on the natural and built environment, but is not consistent with those project objectives identified in *the East Lake Sammamish Trail Interim Use and Resource Protection Plan*.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

East Lake Sammamish Interim Use Trail

The Interim Use Trail will follow the former railbed from Gilman Boulevard in Issaquah, north to the SR 520 off ramp in Redmond. The enclosed maps, 1-10, display the alignment of the railbed, the extent of the trail corridor, significant environmental features, public access points, private and public trail crossings, existing structures and proposed mitigation. The enclosed table provides additional detail. Following is a summary of the proposed trail elements:

- The interim use trail will be developed on the existing railbed, which varies between 8 and 12 feet.
- The railbed will be smoothed and covered with 4" of clean gravel.
- One removable bollard will be placed between the two existing ecology blocks on each side of the trail where a private or public road crosses.
- Fencing will be installed along the interim use trail edge in areas where needed to provide safety, prevent trespass, or protect adjacent property owners' privacy and County liability.
- Guardrail or traffic pylons will be used to delineate the trail edge, where the interim use trail is immediately adjacent or very close to roads accessing adjacent properties.
- At each of the ten (10) public access points, and at regular intervals along the interim use trail, etiquette and rules signs will be installed.
- Railings will be installed on the three existing bridges, at North Fork Issaquah, Laughing Jacobs, and at Stationing Point 488.
- Vegetation will be managed to maintain sight distance.

Resource Protection

In addition to continuing provision of regular maintenance and monitoring of the trail, employing best management practices, coordinating with permitting authorities as needed, and scheduling maintenance activity when natural systems will be least affected, the following specific resource protection measures will be implemented:

- Split rail cedar fencing will be installed adjacent to environmentally sensitive areas such as wetlands, streams and steep slopes.
- Signage will be installed to identify sensitive areas and discourage disturbance.
- Remaining railroad ties will be removed from sensitive areas.
- Litter receptacles and dog waste control stations will be installed at each of the public access points.
- Sani-cans will be installed in three (3) locations—between Gilman Boulevard and I-90, at SE 43rd, and at approximately 187th NE—to supplement existing public restrooms at Marymoor Park and Lake Sammamish State Park.

Responding to Major Concerns

Safety

The railbed alignment is the safest alternative for interim trail users, because it does not place trail users on inadequate busy parkway shoulders. The railbed alignment does not rely on public roads for 1.6 miles, and it eliminates the addition of 26 crossings.

The railbed alignment is also safest for vehicles crossing the interim trail. Of the 76 trail crossings, trail users will have the right-of-way on all crossings except for public streets. Where trail users have the right-of-way, warning signs will be installed to provide an additional safety measure. Trail users will be required to stop at public roads, and where adjacent crosswalks exist, users will be directed to them. Railroads have always maintained stop signs for vehicles on each side of all crossings. Continuing the historical practice of vehicles stopping before crossing the trail corridor is the safest approach.

Fencing will be installed to prevent trespass and provide privacy for adjacent property owners. Fencing will also prevent trail users from accessing private recreation properties and facilities, such as docks and watercraft.

Bridge railings, vegetation management, and bollards at crossings are also proposed for safety.

Equestrian use is not recommended for the Interim Use Trail because of the length of narrow railbed width which has to accommodate two way traffic by a variety of users, in conjunction with the number of adjacent residences and trail crossings, proximity to sensitive areas and Lake Sammamish, and lack of a separated trail and horse trailer parking.

Due to the trail surfacing, high speed bicycles will avoid the Interim Use Trail.

King County Parks will continue discussions with bicycle groups to establish a regular ride monitoring program that can provide Park Maintenance staff with early information about damaged or nonfunctioning facilities or conditions.

Parking will be discouraged along East Lake Sammamish Parkway to eliminate trespassing on private property to reach the interim use trail, and so as not to add to the potential for accidents along the Parkway.

Natural Resources

The railbed alignment has the least impact to wetlands. Approximately .086 acres of wetland will be filled, and will be replaced at required ratios.

A biological assessment has been prepared to evaluate the impact of the Interim Use Trail on all listed or threatened species. Appropriate mitigations identified through consultations with the

various permitting authorities will be implemented to protect these valuable species and their habitats.

Signage and fencing will be used to identify and discourage entry into sensitive areas.

Appropriate erosion control measures will be implemented during all development and maintenance activities.

Parking

Parking will be available at Marymoor Park, along NE 70th Street and NE 65th Street, at the general parking area of Lake Sammamish State Park, and during evenings and weekends at the Issaquah District Court on SE 56th Street.

These locations provide adequate parking capacity for expected weekend peaks, however, King County will continue discussions with office buildings near 51st Street to pursue additional parking opportunities in case actual demand exceeds current expectations.

Aesthetics

The railbed alignment provides the most aesthetic trail experience for interim trail users.

Some adjacent property owners are concerned about the look of the proposed fencing. Chainlink fencing is proposed because it is sturdy, easily installed, has minimal impacts to the natural environment, and is economical.

Adjacent property owners may choose to upgrade fencing at their own cost, provided the upgraded fence provides adequate safety and/or liability protection.

Vegetated buffers may be a preferred edge delineation in many locations, but are more appropriately installed when the final alignment is confirmed through the master plan phase.

Users

Walkers, joggers, and bicyclists will use the interim trail.

Due to the gravel surface, in line skaters and road bicycles will probably not use the interim trail.

Equestrian use is not recommended on the Interim Use Trail.

Property Ownership

There are numerous controversies about ownership of the rail corridor. Some adjacent property owners have asserted that King County acquired an easement and not fee ownership.

Because the entire corridor is railbanked pursuant to federal law, the outcome of ownership assertions of adjacent property owners will have little or no effect on the County's ability to

develop the recreational trail on both the easement and fee interest portions of the corridor. Federal railbanking law allows development of recreational trails and management of the railbanked corridor irrespective of the underlying ownership.

King County's responsibility under the federal railbanking rules includes managing the corridor. King County administers special use permits as a technique to ensure that any modification of the corridor does not negatively impact the trail or the ability to return the corridor to railroad use. King County Parks and King County Property Services Division will continue to administer the special use permit process so as to minimize inconvenience and expense to adjacent property owners.